

Recalling Paul Gottfried on Southern Heritage

By Boyd D. Cathey

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Back a little over thirteen years ago (2007) as chairman of North Carolina's annual Confederate Flag Day observances, I invited my friend Dr. Paul Gottfried to travel to the Tar Heel State to be the keynote speaker for our event at the historic 1840 State Capitol. His remarkable address was later reprinted in several journals, including the old and much-lamented *Southern Partisan* magazine.

Recently, in surveying the hundreds of older files I've collected I noticed Paul's address, and I re-read it. And I noticed how prescient and still-current it remains. In 2007 he observed events occurring and trends that were quickly developing, and in dramatic fashion he both saluted the dwindling number of Southerners who were actually defending their culture while also warning them about what was happening and about to happen.

Since Dr. Gottfried's Cassandra-like adverntence to that audience of 150 brave souls in the State Capitol's House of Representatives chamber that crisp March Saturday, things have gotten incredibly worse...to the point that there is now a real question as to whether anything, not just symbols and monuments, but anything in our Southern heritage will survive the present revolution and the utter and craven cowardice of the political (and cultural) elites who are supposedly on "our side." Almost without exception those leaders have deserted the battlefield, even given way to the Enemies of our culture.

These days lines from William Butler Yeats' eschatologically-tinged poem written after the devastation of the First World War, "The Second Coming," return to me constantly, emblematic of our current age:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Ironically, I know of no stronger defender of our Southern heritage and traditions and our rights historically, than my friend Paul Gottfried. Of Jewish Hungarian descent, educated at Yale (PhD), professor emeritus at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, author of around twenty superb books mostly on political theory, a polyglot whose work is actually better known and appreciated in Europe—he has continued the, at times, lonely task of defending the older Conservatism (which welcomed Southerners) that once enjoyed respectability and currency, but now has been overwhelmed and practically exiled by the pseudo-conservative, warmed-over globalist Neoconservatives, descendants of Marxist Leon Trotsky, who despise our Southern traditions and heritage.

They much prefer embracing all the “civil rights” conquests of the far Left and zealously pushing American involvement in wars—almost anywhere—across the globe to establish what they call “liberal democracy.” Which of course, means the imposition of same sex marriage, transgenderism, destruction of older traditions and religious belief if these stand in the way of their plans: thus, for example, the late John McCain’s frenzied attack on Russia’s Vladimir Putin because Putin supports traditional marriage and because Russia has outlawed homosexual propaganda in Russian schools. Such positions are a no-no, unacceptable to our Neoconservative elites in the Republican Party or on Fox News. Older traditions which stand in the way of Neoconservative internationalism and egalitarianism must be attacked and displaced, and anyone defending them maligned and excluded from “the Conservative Movement.”

Just recently the American embassy in Moscow ostentatiously flew the gay liberation flag to celebrate gay rights (Russia had just overwhelmingly passed constitutional amendments completely outlawing same sex marriage). President Putin’s [comment](#) (July 3) was to mock the silly American gesture: “Let them celebrate,” he responded to the stunt. “They’ve shown a certain something about the people who work there,” he added with a wry smile. But the embassy’s action also illustrates something about current American culture and society, and the Neocon dominance even within the Trump administration, and it may help to explain why the Neoconservative virus which dominates the Conservative Movement and the GOP also despises the traditional South and its heritage.

I pass on Professor Gottfried’s remarkable clarion call, his 2007 speech, which is still current and spot on, even more so in today’s revolutionary, anti-Southern and anti-Confederate atmosphere. Prophetic and hard, but necessary truth, if we would only listen and act.

WHY DO THEY HATE THE SOUTH AND ITS SYMBOLS?

By Professor Paul Gottfried

Confederate Flag Day State Capitol Raleigh N.C. – March 3 2007

Those Southern secessionists whose national flag we are now celebrating have become identified not only with a lost cause but with a now publicly condemned one. Confederate flags have been removed from government and educational buildings throughout the South, while Confederate dignitaries whose names and statues once adorned monuments and boulevards are no longer deemed as fit for public mention.

The ostensible reason for this obliteration or dishonoring of Southern history, save for those civil rights victories that came in the second half of the twentieth century, has been the announced rejection of a racist society, a development we are persistently urged to welcome. During the past two generations or so, the South, we have been taught, was a viciously insensitive region, and the Southern cause in 1861 was nothing so much as the attempt to perpetuate the degradation of blacks through a system based on racial slavery. We told now that we should therefore rejoice at the reconstructing of Southern society and culture in a way that excludes, and indeed extirpates from our minds, except as an incentive to further white atonement, the pre-civil rights past, also known as "the burden of Southern history." This last, frequently encountered phrase is from the title of a famous study of the South by C. Vann Woodward, who in his time was a liberal-minded Southern historian.

Arguments can be raised to refute or modify the received account of Southern history now taught in our public schools and spread by leftist and neoconservative journalists. One can point to the fact that a crushing federal tariff falling disproportionately on Southern states contributed to the sectional hostilities that led to the Southern bid for independence. One can also bring up the willingness of Southern leaders to free blacks and even to put them in grey uniforms, as the price of the freedom that Southerners were seeking from Northern control. And even if one deplores slavery, this commendable attitude, which was also shared by some Confederate leaders, does not justify the federal invasion of the South, with all of its attendant killing and depredation. That invasion took place, moreover, in violation of a right to secede, with which several states, including Virginia, had entered the Union.

A comparison is drawn nowadays between two supposedly equivalent evils, the Old South and Nazi Germany. This comparison has entered the oratory of the NAACP and the Black Caucus; it has also has appeared with increasing frequency in social histories that have come from the American historical profession since the Second World War. A bizarre variation on this comparison, and one frequently heard from the American political Left, is between the Holocaust and Southern slavery. First brought up by the historian Stanley Elkins (when I was still an undergraduate), this seemingly unstoppable obscenity is resurrected whenever black politicians demand reparations. Not surprisingly, those who claim that the Holocaust was unique and that comparing it to any other mass murders, particularly those committed by the Communists, is an impermissible outrage have never to my knowledge protested the likening of American slavery or segregation to the ghastliness of Auschwitz.

The benign acceptance of this comparison by would-be Holocaust-custodians has more to do with leftist political alliances than it does with any genuine reaction to Nazi atrocities.

At the very least, reason would require us to acknowledge that Southern slave-owners were vitally concerned about preserving their human chattel, even if they sometimes failed to show them due Christian charity and concern. Unlike the Nazis, these slave-owners were not out to exterminate a race of people; nor did Southern theologians and political leaders deny the humanity of those who served them, a point that historians Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese have demonstrated at some length.

But all of this has been by way of introduction to the gist of my remarks. What interests me as a sympathetic outsider looking at your culturally rich region, goes back to an agonized utterance made by someone at the end of William Faulkner's magnificent literary achievement, *The Sound and the Fury*. The character, Quentin, who has journeyed from Mississippi to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to study at Harvard, and who will eventually take his life, tries to convince himself that "No, I don't hate the South." This question is no longer a source of tortured embarrassment, but part of a multicultural catechism that requires an immediate affirmative answer. That is to say, every sound-thinking (bien-pensant) respondent is supposed to hate the "real" South, as opposed to warm-weather resorts that cater to retirees and in contrast to places commemorating Jimmy Carter and Martin Luther King. The South, as the location of the Lost Cause and of Confederate war monuments, is one that we are taught to put out of our minds. It is something that a sensitive society should endeavor to get beyond—and to suppress.

Looking at this anti-Southernness, in whose filter displaying a Confederate battle flag, particularly in the South, has been turned into a hate crime, one may wish to consider the oddness of such an attitude. Why should those associated with a defeated cause, and one whose combatants were long admired as heroic even by the victorious side, become moral pariahs for their descendants? Is there anything startlingly new about our knowledge of Southern history since the early 1950s, when my public school teachers in Connecticut spoke with respect about Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, which would account for the present condemnation of the same figures? A few years ago, following my viewing of "Gods and Generals," a movie that deals with the personality and military career of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, I was struck by the widespread attacks on the movie director, Ron Maxwell. Apparently this celebrated director had failed to use his art to expose "Southern racism."

In fact there was nothing in the movie that suggests any sympathy for human bondage. In one memorable scene, for example, Jackson's black manservant raises a question in the presence of his master, about whether it is proper to hold a fellow-Christian as a slave. The devout Presbyterian Jackson, who ponders this question, has no answer for his manservant, with whom he has just been praying. How any of this constitutes a defense of slavery is for me incomprehensible, but it does confirm my impression that there is something peculiarly twisted about the current repugnance for the Old South—and indeed for *any* South except for the one reconstructed by federal bureaucrats in the last fifty years. On visits to Montgomery, Alabama, I have noticed two local histories, which, like straight lines, never intercept, but nonetheless confront each other on public plaques. One is associated with the birthplace of the Confederacy; and the other with the political activities of Martin Luther King and the distinctly leftist Southern Poverty Law Center. The headquarters of the SPLC, this watchdog of Political Correctness, stands

Center. The headquarters of the SPLC, this watchdog of Political Correctness, stands obliquely down the street below the state capitol.

It may have been a pipe dream that the two historical narratives, divided by culture as well as race, could be either bridged or allowed to function simultaneously. What has happened is entirely different. One of the two competing narratives, the one about the South as a bigoted backwater until the triumph of revolutionary forces aided by the federal government changed it, has not only triumphed but has been used to drive out its rival narrative. It might have been a happier outcome if Southern whites and Southern blacks could have agreed on a single narrative that would not demean either race. The second best outcome would have been if both had retained their accounts of the Southern past, as separate non-intersecting ones that nonetheless remained equally appropriate for different groups. The worst outcome, however, is the one that we now have. It is one in which the descendants of the defeated are taught to vilify or treat dismissively their ancestors, so that they can demonstrate their broadmindedness and remorse about past racism. As a result of this inflicted attitude one is no longer allowed to speak about the South as an historical region without focusing on its real or alleged sins.

But this has not always been the official situation. Certainly this was not the case, even in the North, from the years after Reconstruction up until the second half of the twentieth century, when even veterans of the Union army praised their former foes. It was also not always the case even afterwards, as Shelby Foote's treatment of the losing side in his work on the Civil War, a classic that has gone through multiple printings, would indicate. The venting of hate and contempt on the South, as found in such predictably unfriendly authors as Eric Foner and James McPherson, is a relatively recent phenomenon. It underscores the fact that the Old South has been defeated twice—and the second time at the level of historical memory even more disastrously than in a shooting war that it lost in the 1860s.

The American white South has fallen victim to the "politics of guilt," a dreary subject, albeit one on which I have written widely. The Yankee victors of the 1860s, who overwhelmed the Southerners by virtue of their numbers and superior industrial power, did considerable wartime damage. They also subsequently occupied the land of those whom they had vanquished militarily, but then did something that was equally important. They went home, and permitted their devastated opponents to rebuild without an occupying army. What I mean to say is that the first occupation was morally and psychologically less destructive than the ever deepening humiliation that is going on now.

The first victors were mostly Yankee Protestants, who in some ways were similar to those they had invaded and occupied. Once the passions of fratricidal war had cooled, these Yankees were able to view their former enemies as kindred spirits. Although they were establishing a bourgeois commercial regime, one that differed from the prevalent Southern way of life, the winning side had also recruited farmers and those whose culture did not diverge significantly from that of those who had fought on the Southern side. In a certain sense Socrates' observation about Greeks once applied to Americans as

well. While they could fight brutally with each other, they were still brothers, and so some form of “reconciliation” was eventually possible for the former enemies. And both North and South came up with a narrative about their past differences which bestowed honor to the heroes on both sides. This was possible with the Yankee Unionists, who wished to draw Southerners back into their community, even after a terrible war had been fought to keep the Southerners in a Union that they had tried to leave.

But the second civil war seeks the utter humiliation of those who are seen as opponents of a society that is still being imposed. The Southern traditionalists from this perspective are particularly obnoxious inasmuch as they are a full two-steps behind the project in question. Those who insist on these changes are no longer Victorian capitalists or Methodist and Congregationalist villagers from the North. They are post-bourgeois social engineers and despisers of Western civilization, a stage of development that these revolutionaries identify with discrimination and exclusion.

In Southern traditionalists they see those who are still celebrating a pre-bourgeois, agrarian, and communally structured world. That world appealed to hierarchy, place, and family, and its members displayed no special interest in reaching out to alien cultures. Such ideals and attitudes and the landed, manorial society out of which they came point back to a nineteenth-century conservative configuration. For our post-bourgeois leftist intelligentsia, this point of reference and model of behavior cannot be allowed to persist. It clashes with feminism and the current civil rights movement, and hinders the acceptance of a multicultural ambience.

The fact that people like yourselves are still around and still honoring the national flag of nineteenth-century landed warriors from the American South might have the effect, or so it is thought, of making others equally insensitive. Even worse, those who engage in these celebratory rites do not express the now fashionable “guilt” about members of their race and tribe. Those being remembered had owned slaves, and they would have denied women, whom in any case they treated as inherently different from men, equal access to jobs. Needless to say, non-Westerners are not required to dwell on similar improprieties among their ancestors or contemporaries, and so they may celebrate their collective pasts without disclaimers or reservations. The hairshirt to be worn only fits Western bodies, and in particular impenitent Southern ones.

It is against this background that one might try to understand the loathing that the political, journalistic, and educational establishment reserves for the unreconstructed white inhabitants of the South. You seem to bother that establishment to a degree that Louis Farrakhan and those unmistakable anti-white racists, who are often found in our elite universities, could never hope to equal. You exemplify what the late Sam Francis called the “chief victimizers” in our victimologically revamped society, an experimental society that fits well with our increasingly rootless country. But your enemies are also the enemies of historic Western civilization, or of the West that existed in centuries past. You may take pride in those whom you honor as your linear ancestors but equally in the anger of those who would begrudge you the right to honor them. What your critics find inexcusable is that you are celebrating your people’s past, which was a profoundly conservative one based on family and community, and those who created and defended

it. For your conspicuous indiscretions, I salute you; and I trust that generations to come will take note of your willingness to defy the spirit of what is both a cowardly and tyrannical age.

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